

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

February 1, 2006

The Honorable Gale Norton  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Norton:

We respectfully request that the Department of the Interior and specifically, the Bureau of Indian Affairs ensure that the Wind River Irrigation Project (WRIP) receives a fair share of the \$7.5 million included in the fiscal year 2006 Interior Appropriations bill for rehabilitation of Indian irrigation systems.

The WRIP is located on the Wind River Indian Reservation, which is home to the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Tribes. The irrigation project is owned and operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and has been since it was first authorized by Congress. Unfortunately, the WRIP has declined to a state of extreme disrepair over the years. Due to deferred maintenance and inadequate funding, the irrigation system has inadequate and unserviceable structures, extensive seepage along delivery canals, and insufficient drainage. Of the 40,000 acres of irrigable land, approximately 25 percent is idle and lacks adequate water delivery systems.

As you know the fiscal year 2006 Department of the Interior Appropriations Bill (P.L. 109-54) contains the following language:


“The addition of \$7,500,000 in non-reimbursable construction funds for Indian irrigation rehabilitation is separate from the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project, which retains its own construction budget of \$12,773,000. Within the funds provided for Indian irrigation rehabilitation, a number of Bureau and tribal projects are in desperate need of immediate attention to continue delivering water to users. The Bureau is expected to consult with the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations, in the form of a detailed proposal, prior to obligating funds. The Bureau is expected to administer these funds from the central office program level to address projects with the greatest need of rehabilitation. Construction of new projects or expansion of existing projects is secondary to the rehabilitation, reconstruction, and necessary upgrade of current irrigation projects and systems. Specific projects to be addressed under these guidelines, and to be addressed in the Bureau's proposal for the obligation of these funds are: the Fort Yates Unit of the Standing Rock Sioux Project, the Blackfeet Irrigation Project, the Crow Irrigation Project, the Fort Belknap Irrigation Project, the Fort Peck Irrigation Project, and the *Wind River Irrigation Project*.”

It is our understanding that the BIA will soon be releasing the monies. It is a priority for us that an adequate portion of the funding be directed to the WRIP to begin its rehabilitation. Although it is estimated that approximately \$60 million is needed to fully rehabilitate the WRIP, these monies are an important first step.

The agreement for these funds was negotiated between the Wyoming, Montana and North Dakota delegations. While we agree that there is a need for improvements in both Montana and North Dakota, we are committed to ensuring that the WRIP receives substantial funding. The WRIP must be rehabilitated for the tribes of the Wind River Indian Reservation to become self-sustaining. We look forward to working with you to make that happen.

Thank you for your immediate attention to our request.

Sincerely,

		
Craig Thomas United States Senator	Mike Enzi United States Senator	Barbara Cubin Member of Congress

cc: James Cason, Associate Deputy Secretary of the Interior  
Michael Olsen, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs